

# WAIKATO WEEKEND

## BOOK REVIEWS

### FICTION **The Shark Party** Janet Colson Escalator Press, \$30

Domestic violence knows no barriers. Age, gender, class, ethnicity: brutality committed by those closest to the victim cuts across every social category. Few are the novels that confront this uncomfortable truth. As such, New Zealand author Janet Colson's *The Shark Party* is a brave, enthralling first book.

At its heart, this is a plot- and character-driven romance-thriller. The title refers to a bash to showcase alt-artist Damien Hirst's shark in formaldehyde, *The Infinite Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*. It's into this world, that of cultural-philanthropy and art-buying (for revenue rather than altruistic reasons) we're launched as independent artist Carla's relationship with tycoon and benefactor, Nathan Lowell is detailed. Her happenstance encounters with indie-filmmaker, Patrick, an unplanned pregnancy and an examination of her fraught relationship with her father ensue.

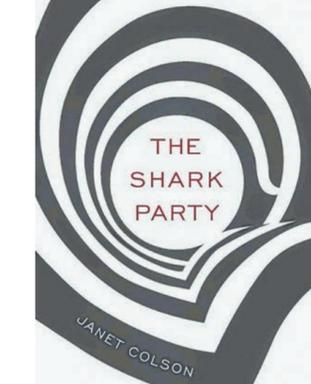
Throughout the money-hungry, incestuous worlds of big business and the arts are captured with the conviction of, one suspects, an author with inside

knowledge. Colson's control of the plot and interior of the book are matched by her exploration of how Nathan's need for workplace control spills into the home. Where the narrative does let itself down is its setting. New York, sumptuous in cultural mediums as diverse as *Sex and the City* and Truman Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* is also *The Shark Party's* backdrop. But whereas Capote's novella, for instance, turns the Big Apple into a rich character, in Colson's novel this most redolent of milieus is underplayed, especially so in the opening chapters when Carla traverses so widely and frequently through New York's spaces and places.

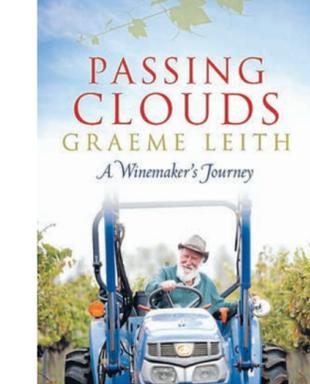
That said, for its unflinching depiction of intimate partner violence and familial dysfunction, its pitch-perfect, disquieting representation of the arts association with commerce and for its portrayal, in Carla of a modern-day survivor, *The Shark Party* is an assured read.

### MEMOIR **Passing Clouds: A Winemaker's Journey** Graeme Leith Allen & Unwin, \$40

Graeme Leith's memoir is in many ways a classic post-war tale of adventure and achievement. But it also contains the kind



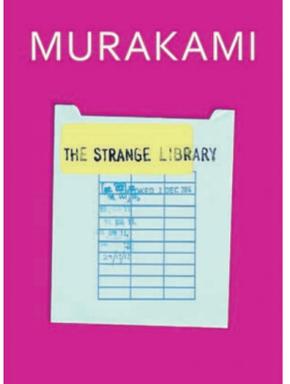
of heartbreak that rarely touches most people's lives. In simple writing he describes growing up in working-class Preston, becoming a tradesman – but always having a creative side; going to England in 1960 aged 20, studying Italian in Perugia, meeting his first wife, returning to Melbourne, children, separation, marriage, more children – and, along the way, becoming involved in the Pram Factory revolution in Australian theatre as well as becoming co-founder of the Passing Clouds winery. In 1984, however, the tale took a tragic turn when his daughter by his first marriage was



murdered. It is a moving, sometimes chilling part of the book – the unifying theme of which is the art of vinification and the fortifying wine it yields.

### FICTION **The Strange Library** Haruki Murakami Harvill Secker, \$35

Like Audrey Niffenegger's self-illustrated *The Night Bookmobile* from a few years ago, this beautiful little book seems more of a strange and intriguing child's picture



book than anything else – but, like Niffenegger's, it has an unexpectedly sad, bleak ending. A boy visits a library, but once there is trapped in a nightmare that seems part Borges, part Kafka and part Monty Python, a parable about books and reading whose meaning is sunk too deep to dig out except in hard-won fragments. But the most remarkable thing about this book is the high production values and exquisite design by Suzanne Dean, involving old-fashioned library stamps and pockets, illustrations and sketches from earlier centuries, spooky drawings and marbled endpapers.

## TOP 5: CRIME FICTION

- 1** **Gone Girl**  
Gillian Flynn  
Hachette  
\$28
- 2** **The Girl on the Train**  
Paula Hawkins  
Doubleday  
\$37
- 3** **Personal**  
Lee Child  
Bantam  
\$38
- 4** **Private Vegas**  
James Patterson  
Century  
\$37
- 5** **I am Pilgrim**  
Terry Hayes  
Corgi  
\$25

Source: Nielsen BookScan

## THE BEST BOOKS I NEVER WROTE ...

### Jennifer Ashton reveals her favourite books.



**Making Peoples, by James Belich**  
This remains my favourite general history of New Zealand, even if it stops at the beginning of the 20th century. James Belich manages to make 19th-century New Zealand seem like the kind of energetic, rough-and-tumble place it undoubtedly was, and he inserts enough argument in there to prevent the book from being just

another dry retelling of events. And it's one of the few history books you're ever going to read that includes jokes.

### **Trial of the Cannibal Dog, by Anne Salmond**

As always, Anne Salmond's sweep is magisterial as she describes James Cook's three voyages around the Pacific and explains how and why things went so dreadfully wrong in Hawaii in 1779. But what stays with me is the empathy she made me feel for him.

She portrays Cook not as a stony-faced Enlightenment hero but as someone whose determination to act reasonably and fairly towards both his own men and the people of the Pacific drained away as life on board ship collided with island politics and culture.

### **My Name Was Judas, by CK Stead**

I don't often re-read books, but I've read this three times. CK Stead rescues Judas from being the stereotypical bad guy of those stories we were told at Sunday School and turns him into a rounded, sympathetic character whose actions become not just explicable but logical.

### **The Surgeon of Crowthorne, by Simon Winchester**

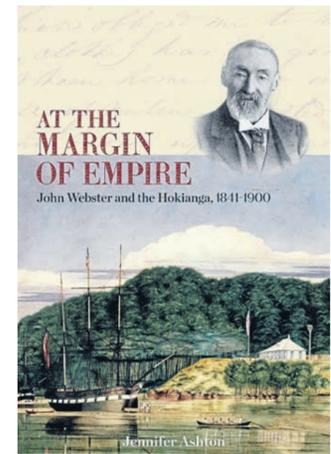
Reading a history of the origins of the *Oxford English Dictionary* might sound about as thrilling as reading the dictionary itself. But the clue to what makes this such a fascinating account is in the subtitle: A Tale of Murder, Madness and the Oxford English Dictionary. Simon Winchester uses the life of one of the OED's earliest contributors, Dr WC Minor, who

just happened to be incarcerated in Broadmoor Lunatic Asylum, as a way of looking at how the dictionary was conceived. It's a masterclass in how the lives of individuals can illuminate history.

### **True History of the Kelly Gang, by Peter Carey**

I like this book for several reasons. It saved my sanity when I was laid up with an injury a few years ago, but I would have loved it anyway because of the way Carey uses language to give Ned Kelly a unique voice and in the process save him from being the cardboard cut-out of Australian national storytelling.

*At the Margin of Empire: John Webster and the Hokiang, 1842-1900* by Jennifer Ashton is published by Auckland University Press, \$50.



# To the rescue of an ill-treated elephant

Continued from page B1

Jack says on the second day Sook Sai was at the park, he and his mother walked to where she was in quarantine. She heard their voices and started to run towards them. "She remembered us." Sook Sai did the same thing on Jack's second-to-last day. "She heard our voices and spun around."

Tracey Hand, who teaches at Blockhouse Bay Intermediate School and shared the fund-raising and rescue with Jack and Viv, says when she first visited Elephant Nature Park in 2010, she was struck by the amazing job Lek Chailert does.

The stories of abuse broke Tracey's heart. She decided she'd like to help, read about Jack's involvement, contacted Viv, they became friends, and they worked for over two years to raise money for a rescue. Tracey saw the change in Sook Sai.

"I know it is only one elephant, one soul, but if we hadn't done this, she [Sook Sai] wouldn't be free now. To Sook Sai, it's made a huge difference."

Tracey says there is also the valuable spin-off of educating others. She's had a lot of support with the project from pupils at Blockhouse Bay Intermediate and they've learned about Lek's work, and the issues around elephants in Thailand. "I'm passing on the knowledge, and the story, and in future they will be responsible travellers."

Sook Sai's long history of abuse means she needs gentle care and attention. But she's made progress even in the week or so that the Lantings have been home. They've been sent photos of her wallowing happily in mud and playing with a young elephant. Jack and Viv are delighted. During his month at the park, Jack helped out with the cats and dogs that live there, too, and he spent as much time as he could with Sook Sai – and his hero, Lek Chailert.

Lek Chailert has got to know Jack well. On the phone from Thailand, she says he is a boy to admire.

"Jack thinks about others, he is a good boy. He has a beautiful heart. I can see that the beauty comes from inside, and he has so much care for animals."

Lek says when she sees Jack walking in the park, he is very gentle with its inhabitants. She is sure he will achieve this goal of becoming a veterinarian and working with elephants.

Lek says Jack's mother should be given credit, too, for the things Jack has achieved. "It starts from the family. She is excellent, she has a beautiful heart as well. She supports him and guides him."

Jack says pretty much the same thing. "I couldn't have done all this without my mum."

Jack and Viv eventually want to start their own elephant sanctuary in the Thai tourist area of Phuket.

It sounds like a huge challenge. But as Lek says, "Jack is a boy who will make a difference. He is making a difference now, he will be an example to others."



**Injured:** Sook Sai had been badly treated and neglected. She has a huge abscess on her face and a broken back ankle was badly set.  
**Photo:** Tracey Hand



**Fundraisers:** Jack Lanting and Tracey Hand talk to Sook Sai in the river, watched by Elephant Nature Park mahout Mong Set.  
**Photo:** Viv Lanting



**Educator:** Teacher Tracey Hand named Sook Sai in honour of the better life that lies ahead.  
**Photo:** Angelo Dal Bello



**Rescuer:** Jack Lanting on the truck with Sook Sai.  
**Photo:** Tracey Hand